

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to North Africa.]

Mediterranean region
is vital to Europe's interests. In fact, the Mediterranean
can logically be viewed as an adjunct of Europe, and our
policies towards the region could be largely cast in terms
of our relations to Europe.

Yet the north and central European countries have not
tended to see the Mediterranean as a region whose security
required their participation.

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The picture is not quite this static, however, and there
has been some movement in the past several years as a result
of the Europeans' growing economic and political capabilities,

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the increased Soviet presence, and the deteriorating political situation in much of the North Africa and the Middle East.

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France

DeGaulle saw the Mediterranean region as an important area for developing his third force concept -- in a sense, the fulcrum of the lever that was to stretch from Southeast Asia to Latin America. He sought to circumscribe the US role and prestige and reversed France's pro-Israeli policy of the 1956 war to bring it more into line with the aspirations of the Arabs. Under Pompidou, the Mediterranean has assumed an even more central role. The new French leadership has evidently decided to husband its resources by retrenching on some of DeGaulle's distant enterprises and concentrating on the promising area nearer to home.

Pompidou has moved to strengthen there the French position in the Mediterranean region by:

-- removing political irritants and continuing investment and aid technical assistance programs to reinforce the French position in the former North African territories.

-- trying assiduously to keep great power intervention in the Arab-Israeli dispute in a four-power arrangement with French participation;

-- promoting arms sales (and thus increasing France's influence) in Spain, Maghreb, Greece, and Iraq;

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- taking a concerned view of developments in Lebanon;
- toying with ideas for a neutralization of the Mediterranean and showing increasing interest in some sort of Western Mediterranean entente;

- and, most dramatically, agreeing to sell Mirage aircraft to Libya as the first step in a broad program of economic and military cooperation.

In sum, France has reasserted itself as a force to be reckoned with in the Mediterranean region.

France's interests in the Mediterranean are not only the product of its quest for grandeur. It relies on Libya and Algeria for 45 percent of its oil, and Iraq contributes another 20 percent. Proceeds from sales of arms contribute significantly to French foreign exchange earnings. A solid position in North Africa helps ensure continued access to and influence in Francophone Black Africa. An active Mediterranean policy offers some hope of developing strength against a Soviet presence in the Mediterranean that the French view with concern and an American presence that they view with something less than enthusiasm.

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The French are aware, however, that the American presence is still essential. Even in the darkest days of the Franco-US relationship, DeGaulle made clear that he did not want to see the Sixth Fleet withdrawn. Indeed, it is the protective umbrella of the US presence that enables France to pursue its Mediterranean policy.

French hopes of offering an alternative to both the U.S. and the USSR are far from realization and their prospects of becoming the premier power in the Mediterranean are actually slim. The other regional states are no more enthusiastic about French domination than they would be about Soviet or U.S. hegemony. Particularly the former French colonies are anxious to diversify their support in order to avoid the reimposition of a de facto/^{colonial} situation presided over by France. The Eastern Arabs, while welcoming France's attitude, know well that only the USSR or the U.S. can decisively influence affairs in their region.

A French role could be effective as the principal component of increased European involvement in Mediterranean affairs. It is difficult to envision France sharing a leadership position with others, however, and the other Europeans would probably find France an extremely difficult partner.

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We, too, might find France's role a difficult one.

It has already been unhelpful in the Arab-Israeli question, and is not likely to be amenable to suggestions from us on its Mediterranean policy. On the other hand, France has already played a useful role in Algeria by providing an alternative to Soviet involvement, and even the Libyan aircraft sale can be seen in a similar light.

